

Whether you love them or hate them, videogames have become an important part of the global entertainment industry. Since the release of Pong in 1972, videogames have become a multibillion-dollar industry. That created roughly 350,000 jobs in the U.S. in 2023, and generated approximately \$66 billion in the same year (Lahiguera, 2024). Aside from their positive economic impacts, they are immensely popular around the world. With there being an estimated 3 billion gamers (Greitemeyer, 2022) a group made up of various ages, ethnicities, sexual orientations, and genders all united in their love for videogames (Hanson, 2024). It is undeniable that in the 53 years since their inception, videogames have changed the way we interact with one another, how information spreads, and how we tell stories.

But with this increase in popularity and adoption into mainstream culture, has society missed something? How are videogames affecting the people who interact with them, and are the effects positive or negative? Like most things, depending on who you ask you will get different answers. While some praise videogames for their social, learning, and emotional benefits (Staff, 2022), others criticize them for their violent content, and the negative behavioral and psychological issues that arise from such games (Lérida-Ayala et al., 2022). So which is it? Are videogames as a form of mass media responsible for a rise in violent behavior, or do the benefits to playing videogames offset the negatives?

As stated previously, there are arguments in favor of videogames as a positive form of mass media. Studies show that they improve memory, problem-solving capabilities,

mental health, media literacy, and improving hand-eye coordination (Johnson, 2023; Staff, 2022). Although these are just personal benefits of videogames, which ignores the many social benefits that multiplayer videogames provide. Most prominently multiplayer videogames are associated with aiding in the development of social skills, such as leadership, cooperation, and overall social development among players (Ballard & Spencer, 2022; L rida-Ayala et al., 2022).

Additionally, the social aspect of videogames cannot be understated. As demonstrated during the Covid-19 pandemic, videogames can have a tangible effect on people socially. Allowing people to socialize and stay connected when it is impossible, or unsafe, to meet in person (Ballard & Spencer, 2022). This shows that videogames can act as a kind of “third place”, or a social hub, for informal socialization. For example, games like Fortnite hosting musicians such as Travis Scott for live digital concerts in 2020, when the Covid-19 lockdown began (Hanson, 2024).

Although to this point videogames sound great, they have some negatives as well. With prolonged exposure to violent videogames in particular being cited for numerous social and psychological issues, especially in children (Ballard & Spencer, 2022; L rida-Ayala et al., 2022). Such as addiction, reduced empathy, increased hostility, and social isolation (Ballard & Spencer, 2022; L rida-Ayala et al., 2022). While things such as addiction, and increased hostility, and social isolation are inherently harmful. It is important to mention they affect everyone differently, and these effects in one person could cause a chain reaction that causes them in others.

For example, a person may exhibit an increase in hostility, which manifests as bullying towards a teammate in a multiplayer game. Which then may cause the victim to experience social isolation from the experience of being bullied. Additionally, there is no concrete evidence to support the idea that everyone will experience these effects, or that these effects are permanent (Kühn et al., 2019). This means the negative effects are potentially temporary, not universally applicable, and may not lead to any long-term effects.

Overall videogames as a form of mass media are neither the best thing ever, nor the worst. With evidence pointing in both directions as a positive and negative force (Johnson, 2023). With there being a lot of discourse surrounding the subject. Some people avidly defend videogames as a form of storytelling and creativity, highlighting their personal and social benefits. While others focus on the negative effects on mental health and antisocial consequences associated with violent videogames.

Whatever the case is, the most important factor to consider in the debate on videogames is how they affect you personally. There are many different types of videogames, and attempting to categorize all videogames as the same is foolish. Not all multiplayer videogames are violent and not all single player videogames are going to contribute to social and personal development. Different types of videogames will affect different people in different ways. The only person who can decide if the effects are positive or negative in your situation is you.

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